



King County Mental Health Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division 2002 Briefing Paper

STATE MENTAL HEALTH DIVISION PREVALENCE STUDY

BACKGROUND:

In 2000, the state Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) issued an audit of the state mental health system. One of the conclusions reached was that the Medicaid population was a reasonable proxy for the number of persons in a Regional Support Network's (RSNs) service area who suffered from a serious mental disorder or emotional disturbance. This conclusion then became the basis for the redistribution of funding throughout the state. King, Pierce, and Peninsula RSNs were the three RSNs that lost substantial amounts of funding. The funding loss for King County RSN is approximately \$2 million a year for six years. The \$2 million compounds each year, however, so the actual loss to King County is \$40 million.

Unfortunately, the methodology that JLARC used to come to this conclusion had an underlying bias that made its validity suspect. In addition, a previous study conducted by the state Mental Health Division (MHD), the Prevalence Estimation of Mental Illness and Need for Services (PEMINS) study, suggested that the distribution of mental disorders did not mirror the distribution of the Medicaid population. In order to more fully understand the issue of prevalence and the distribution of mental disorders throughout the state, the State Legislature in 2001 commissioned a prevalence study.

The state Mental Health Division subsequently convened a work group that includes RSNs, providers, and client representatives. This group is also getting consultation from prevalence experts throughout the country.

ISSUES/CHALLENGES:

The funding appropriated by the legislature for the prevalence study is not sufficient for a "from scratch" prevalence study. This means that the work group will have to rely on published estimates, where they exist, for different segments of the population or to represent environmental impacts that are believed to affect prevalence, such as the degree of urbanicity of a geographic area. Having to use data from other studies may also make it difficult for the work group to do the local area analyses that are critical to understanding the differences in distribution throughout the state.

DATA:

King County RSN has 21.9% of the Medicaid eligible population and is currently receiving 24.1% of available funds. The funding percent will continue to decrease until 2005 when it is anticipated to be equivalent to the Medicaid eligible population percent. According to the state MHD's PEMINS study, however, King County RSN has 29.8% of the population in need of mental health services.

RECOMMENDATION/LEGISLATIVE ACTION:

MHCADSD supports the prevalence study concept and the work that has gone into it to date. We do want one of the final outcomes to be local area (RSN) analyses using the best estimates available, so that the results can be used for more appropriate funding formula decisions.